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Freeman Elementary water testing shows lead exposure limited to fixtures

Experts release water testing results on schools and homes in Flint

As part of Gov. Rick Snyder's action plan for Flint drinking water, the DEQ today released water testing data from nearly 400 homes and businesses in Flint as well as comprehensive sampling results from Freeman Elementary School.

Both sets of data indicate the problems with lead are localized to individual buildings or even individual faucets, rather than system-wide issues.

"The results from this data underline the need for water testing at all homes, businesses, schools and other buildings in Flint," said George Krisztian, the DEQ's Flint Action Plan Coordinator. "Problems with lead exposure appear to be localized to individual service lines or plumbing fixtures, and we want to see all families in Flint take advantage of free water testing from the state."

Freeman Elementary testing results

At Freeman Elementary, 31 faucets were tested using a series of four samples each. Twenty-two outlets did not show elevated lead exposure, but nine faucets came back with initially high results.

Those nine outlets involve brass components, indicating the problem involves the fixtures or plumbing immediately surrounding the fixture. When the faucets and fountains were operated for several minutes, lead levels fell significantly, in some cases to non-detectable levels.

Additional testing designed to look deep into the school's plumbing did not suggest larger, systemic issues.

Freeman Elementary has several options for remedying the issues at these nine faucets and fountains. The school can elect not to use those particular fountains, or implement a formalized flushing regimen. The sampling results indicate that for all but one tap, a 3- to 4-minute flushing period each morning would drastically reduce lead exposure.

For a permanent solution, the school should opt to replace the faucets and fountains of concern.

"The safety and health of our students are our primary concern at Flint Community Schools, so we will start work as soon as possible to replace faucets, aerators and other related components where high lead levels were detected," FCS Superintendent Bilal Tawwab said.

“Once those fixes have been made, the DEQ has offered to provide additional testing of the water at Freeman Elementary to ensure the water from every sample is safe for our students. Flint Community Schools appreciates the efforts by the DEQ, working with all stakeholders to make sure our water continues to be tested and that our students have access to safe, clean drinking water.”

For Freeman Elementary’s complete sampling results and more information about how sampling was conducted, visit www.michigan.gov/flintwater.

The DEQ and the DLARA also have conducted sampling at other Flint schools, and results will soon be available on the DEQ’s website. Additionally, the state will test every other school in the Flint Community Schools district, as well as any school or daycare in the city. Interested schools and daycare centers should contact George Krisztian at krisztian@michigan.gov.

Homeowner and other customer-requested testing results

Results from the 381 samples from homes, businesses, schools and other facilities that took advantage of free water testing through the state showed similar, localized results. More than 75 percent of the samples analyzed demonstrated lead results of 5 parts per billion or less, and more than 91 percent demonstrated lead results of 15 parts per billion or less.

This data suggests that while some homes experience elevated lead level results due to lead service lines or in-home plumbing, many other homes experience little to no lead. This can make it difficult for homeowners and businesses to predict their lead exposure.

“Since it’s not easy to predict if an individual home’s water is at risk for lead, the best thing all residents can do is get their water tested,” Krisztian said. “It’s a free test that provides valuable information for families.”

Testing is available for free by contacting the Flint Water Plant at 810-787-6537 and pressing 1, or by emailing flintwater@cityofflint.com.

For more information about water samples received through the state’s free testing program, visit www.michigan.gov/flintwater.

How school sampling was conducted

To conduct this comprehensive sampling, the DEQ and Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs began on Oct. 23 with a thorough plumbing assessment of the school to gain a detailed understanding of how water moves through the building and what types of plumbing materials are used. The assessment also identified 31 faucets or fountains in the school that provide water for drinking, cooking and/or food preparation.

On Oct. 24, the DEQ and DLARA took four, 125-milliliter samples from each of the 31 identified faucets and fountains. The first two samples were taken immediately after turning on the faucet, followed by a 30-second flush and then the third sample, followed by a 2-minute flush and then the fourth sample. These samples provided information on the impact of any lead sources in or around each specific faucet and fountain as well as its connecting plumbing.

On Oct. 31, the DEQ and DLARA took an additional 30 samples, 10 each from three sites in the school. These 1-liter samples were taken consecutively, and provided information about the impact of any lead sources deep in the building’s plumbing.